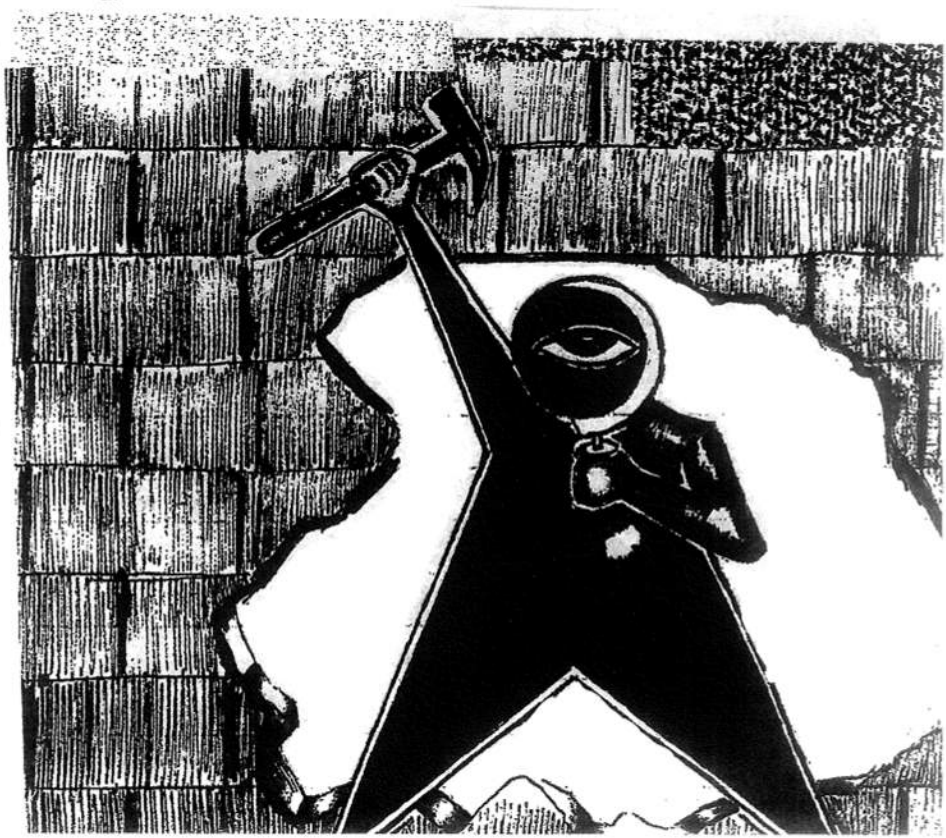
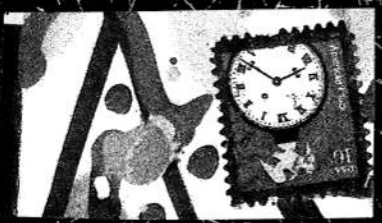
Campaign Against Prison Censorship and Book Banning



As you know, hundreds of thousands of books, magazines and other materials are banned in U.S. prisons. Simultaneously many prison systems are increasing their grip over correspondence, seeking to block physical mail altogether and replace it with scans or tablet based messaging, both of which are tools facilitating surveillance and control. We can tell you from the outside these moves are similar to what is going down out here with oppressive legislatures, school districts, and mainstream media throttling what can be taught, read, and discussed.

At the moment, efforts to push back against censorship and book banning in prisons are disconnected and uncoordinated, from one author somewhere suing to get their book in, to someone locked up over their filing a grievance against a mailroom block. We are part of a growing coalition seeking to band together and coordinate a campaign against censorship and book banning in prisons nationwide.



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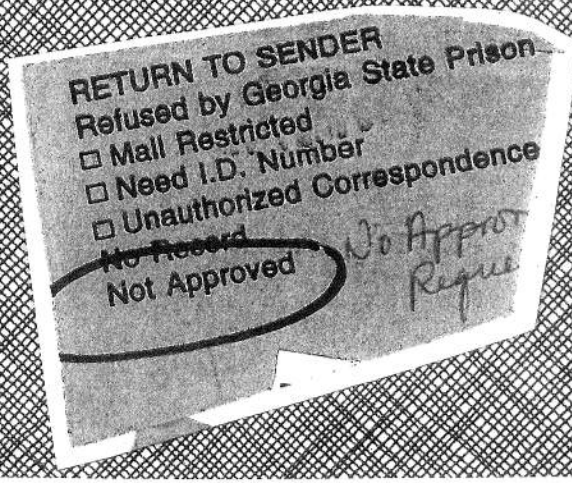
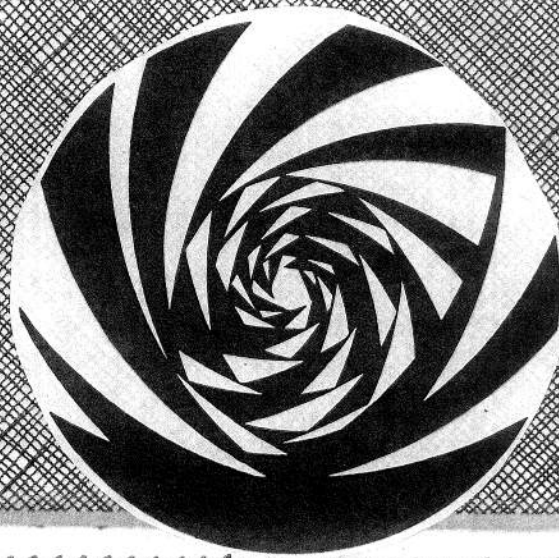


We hope you will join us in building the Coalition Against Prison Censorship and Book Banning. If you are part of a group that is already engaged in struggles against prison censorship and book banning, please reach out to join the campaign. Contact information on the back of this pamphlet.

"Each generation must discover its mission, fulfill it or betray it, in relative opacity."—Franz Fanon



The Absurdity and Depravity of the Rise in Prison Mail Censorship

The pandemic exacerbated the cruel conditions of jail and prison with the closing of educational programs and libraries, preventing incarcerated people from having access to reading materials at a time of increased lockdowns and solitary confinement. We are often told by people writing to us that we are the only way that they can ever receive any reading material. It is in this context that prison authorities have worked to make the problem more cruel by implementing various new restrictions and regulations to prevent literature from reaching people. More often than not, they selectively enforce overly broad interpretations of new policies to cover for political and targeted repression and a general disdain for prisoner rights and the humanities. This prison mail censorship is taking place while right-wing reactionaries are trying to ban books from public schools and libraries, signifying a fascist escalation which must be opposed.

Some prison systems are outsourcing mail processing to profiteering digitization contractors such as Smart Communications or TextBehind: this prevents people from holding physical copies of their mail, forced to read poor scans or use expensive tablets. Others are narrowing the definition of a publisher or distributor to only Amazon or Edward R. Hamilton, preventing ordinary bookstores or publishers of materials otherwise unavailable elsewhere from reaching people in prison. Many prisons, such as medium and high security federal institutions, by policy have previously allowed hardcover books if sent direct from the publisher, but many are now implementing their own institutional supplements which violate national policy. At other spots, they are brazenly banning all books, newspapers and magazines entirely.

Prison censorship includes the nation's largest book ban, not just a few controversial or unorthodox books, but hundreds of thousands of classics, Black literature, LGBTQ contents, educational books and college textbooks, among many others. Prisoners are being denied many educational, mind opening, and entertaining volumes. Books unite us all, despite the racial, sexual orientation, or political beliefs of the authors. We cannot allow the Right-wing politicians, fake parent groups, or other bodies from acting as our censors. It isn't just in prison that they are doing all this, they are doing it all over American society as well. They want ideological and political hegemony and conformity. Fighting book banning is a struggle against fascism. We need to stand up, not back down in the face of unjust authority, or would be dictators.

The Racist Attack on Black Literature

By Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin a nd JoNina Abron-Ervin

Since Black people were forcibly imported into America, through books we have managed to tell our story of slavery and oppression during chattel slavery. The slave narratives written by ex-slaves gave the most accurate depiction of what slavery was like, in almost total contrast to Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin, written by a white author for whites.

In fact, the white slavemaster feared the literate slave, who could read, write, and speak. Anti-slavery activists Sojourner Truth and Frederick Douglass proved them right, Their narratives, because of their popularity, became national best sellers, and they became national Abolitionist leaders.

In the 1920s and 1930s during the Harlem Renaissance, the cultural flowering of Black America flourished. Such writers as Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, Zora Neal Hurston, Alice Moore Dunbar-Nelson, Jessie Redmon Fauset, Georgia Douglas Johnson, Claude McKay, Richard Wright, and Ralph Ellison wrote pioneering novels, poetry, and non-fiction works which touched millions of Black people.

Then, in the 1960s and 1970s during the Civil Rights and Black Power eras, authors such as Lorraine Hansberry, Haki Madhubuti, Amiri Baraka, Aslia Muhammad, James Baldwin, Eldridge Cleaver, Toni Morrison, Glen Ford, Alice Walker, Audre Lord, Walter Mosley, Maya Angelou, and many others used their writing to celebrate Black life and culture and to push for civil and human rights. Since the 1980s, best-selling Black authors have included Octavia E. Butler, Gloria Naylor, Cornel West, Bell Hooks, Manning Marable, and Ta-Nehisi Coates.

As important as Black literature is to Black culture, self-esteem, inspiration, knowledge, and history, it is currently under attack by racist politicians, white supremacists, Trump conservatives and others on the right-wing political spectrum. They refute the historical facts that Black people were ever enslaved or oppressed by the white government or people of the USA. These White supremacists want to ban Black literature from libraries, bookstores, K-12 schools, colleges, universities, and prisons. They want to pretend Black people have no history or place in society.

This new fascist campaign is led by right-wing politicians and fake parent groups railing against "critical race theory," the 1619 project, and the alleged "filth" and "perversion" in LGBTQ children's books. If these conservative, pro-fascist groups have their way, only "pro-family," Christian fascist, and white nationalist materials would be in the schools, libraries, and prisons. Young people would be prevented from accessing relevant cultural materials reflecting who they are.

Neo-fascists in America aim to make toxic masculinity and white nationalism the dominant viewpoint and turn back whatever social advances by Black people have been made in the last fifty years. By changing American society in this way, they will compel the entire society into obedience to the fascist line. Recently, they have begun carrying guns and a list of 400 books they want to ban into library board meetings. Soon it will be in schools and libraries all over the country. This is all extremely dangerous, and we must fight fack...while we still can.

WHAT TYPE OF MOVEMENT DO WE NEED?

It is important that we build a united front against censorship and book banning. This united front must unite all opponents of political censorship and bans on "controversial" books. It should have as its core a prison-school-library anti-censorship protest movement component to combat the racist, homophobic and authoritarian campaign disguised as governmental or parental concern.

Most importantly, the U.S. prison system is the largest book banning agency in the country, so we must make prison book banning a part of the already existing fightback by Black students, LGBTQ, and children's book authors, literary groups like PEN America, and the American Library Association. Indeed, the resources of these groups are an essential element in the fight against book banning in prisons.

This proposed united front must bring together prison support activists, especially many of those already in books through bars programs, radical book publishers, and other groups distributing literature to prisoners, prisoner rights groups, anti-racists, people who have family members in prison, anti-fascist tendencies, and others who are opposed to mass incarceration in the USA and the systematic denial of prisoners' constitutional and human rights. We need to be clear that we are all coming together to create a mass-based fightback, and together that is the only way we can win.

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

NOTICE OF REJECTION OR IMPOUNDMENT OF PUBLICATIONS

Date: [redacted]

Inmate: [redacted] DC# [redacted]

Institution: [redacted]

This is notice that the following publication:

Title: Black August

Volume/Issue/Edition: A Story of African Freedom Fighters By Kiilu Nyasha

Which was received on the following date: 03/02/2022

From: True Leap Press Zine Distre

P.O BOX 6045 Concord CA 94524

Has been reviewed by an authorized employee, and:

- ☐ IS IMPOUNDED pending review by the Department's Literature Review Committee, because another institution believes the publication contains subject matter that is inadmissible per Section (15) of Rule 33-501.401, F.A.C.
- ☑ IS IMPOUNDED pending review by the Department's Literature Review Committee, because the Warden or designee believes the publication contains subject matter that is inadmissible per Section (15) of Rule 33-501.401, F.A.C.
- ☐ IS IMPOUNDED pending review by the Department's Literature Review Committee per Section (19) of Rule 33-501.401, F.A.C. The Warden believes this inmate's prior criminal history or disciplinary record indicates that giving her or him access to subject matter in this publication would constitute a threat to the security, order, or rehabilitative objectives of the correctional system or the safety of a person. (Specify):
- ☐ IS REJECTED and may not be received by inmates. The Department's Literature Review Committee has reviewed the publication and determined that it contains subject matter that is inadmissible per Section (15) of Rule 33-501.401, F.A.C.
- ☐ IS REJECTED for reasons not related to subject matter. (Specify)

Criteria in Section (15) of Rule 33-501.401, F.A.C., authorizes IMPOUNDMENT or REJECTION because the publication:

- ☐ (15)(a) depicts or describes procedures for the construction of or use of weapons, ammunitions, bombs, chemical agents, or incendiary devices;
- ☐ (15)(b) depicts, encourages, or describes methods of escape from any correctional institution or facility, contains blueprints, drawings or similar descriptions of any Department institutions or facility, or includes road maps that can facilitate escape from a correctional institution or facility;
- ☐ (15)(c) depicts or describes procedures for the brewing of alcoholic beverages, or the manufacture of drugs or other intoxicants;
- ☐ (15)(d) depicts how to make an instrument to apply a tattoo, describes how to make or secure ink or other supplies needed to make tattoos, describes tattooing techniques, or contains a tattoo pattern or photograph that is large and distinctive enough to be used as a tattoo pattern;
- ☐ (15)(e) encourages, provides instructions on, or facilitates gambling;
- ☐ (15)(f) is written in code or is otherwise written in a manner that is not reasonably subject to interpretation by Department staff as to meaning or intent;
- ☐ (15)(g) encourages, provides instruction on, or facilitates the commission of a crime;
- ☐ (15)(h) depicts, describes or encourages activities that may lead to the use of physical violence on another person;
- ☑ (15)(i) is dangerously inflammatory in that it advocates or encourages riot, insurrection, rebellion, organized prison protest, disruption of the institution, or the violation of the federal law, state law, or Department rules;
- ☐ (15)(j) includes signs, symbols, or other identifiers of a security threat group, or otherwise promotes the gang culture or lifestyle;
- ☐ (15)(k) threatens physical harm, blackmail or extortion;
- ☐ (15)(l) depicts any of the following sexual conduct: (1.) Actual or simulated sexual intercourse; (2.) Sexual bestiality; (3.) Masturbation; (4.) Sadomasochistic abuse; (5.) Actual lewd exhibition of the genitals; (6.) Actual physical contact with a person's unclothed genitals, pubic area, buttocks, or, if such person is a female, breast with the intent to arouse or gratify the sexual desire of either party; (7.) Any act or conduct which constitutes sexual battery or simulates that sexual battery is being or will be committed.

Incorporated by Reference in Rule 33-501.401, F.A.C.

- ☐ (15)(m) depicts nudity in such a way as to create the appearance that sexual conduct is occurring or imminent such as the display of physical contact or intended physical contact with a person's unclothed genitals, pubic area, buttocks or female breasts orally, digitally or by foreign object, or display of sexual organs in an aroused state.
- ☐ (15)(n) contains criminal history, offender registration, or other personal information about another inmate or offender, which, in the hands of an inmate, presents a threat to the security, order or rehabilitative objectives of the correctional system or to the safety of any person;
- ☐ (15)(o) contains an advertisement promoting any of the following where the advertisement is the focus of, rather than being incidental to, the publication or the advertising is prominent or prevalent throughout the publication: (1.) Three-way calling services; (2.) Pen pal services; (3.) The purchase of products or services with postage stamps; or (4.) Conducting a business or profession while incarcerated.
- ☑ (15)(p) otherwise presents a threat to the security, order, or rehabilitative objectives of the correctional system or the safety of any person.

Page 2-7 National Black Newspaper ← REJECTED BECAUSE IT IS FROM A BLACK NEWSPAPER

"a threat"

THE LIFESPAN OF ANTI-LITERACY

By Wayland "X" Coleman

Why would U.S. prisons – the self-proclaimed "champions of rehabilitation" – ban books and deem literature to be contraband? In order to make sense of this question, it is important for us to take a look at what contemporary incarceration is, so that we can analyze the psychosocial political foundation that has historically allowed one group of people to remove literacy from another in order to secure physical, economic, and intellectual control and dominance. Why is there even a thing such as prohibiting literacy in any setting related to the world's "country of freedom" today, and what are the social, political, and economic patterns that have been able to insidiously maneuver through, and escape generations of struggle to abolish racism, white supremacy, and inequality in Amerikkka? In order to address the question of anti-literacy in its contemporary form, we have to look back at the historical events that shaped the idea of prohibiting literacy in the first place, so that we can analyze it in its proper evolutionary context.

We already know that the sociopolitical and economic strategy of prohibiting literacy in Amerikkka was born from the tomb of Amerikkkan chattel slavery. In a writing titled "Let's Make A Slave Kit," (year unknown), William Lynch explained to white slave owners that they could never let enslaved people learn how to read. In his teachings to the slave owners about how to keep Africans subjugated and in slavery for generations, he explained that if enslaved people ever learned to read, they would then want to negotiate for equal treatment, and would want to have discussions as "humans," and at that point you would have lost a slave. Where Willie Lynch expressed a concern for intelligent negotiation for equality if the oppressed were allowed literacy, Fredrick Douglass's story highlights the worries of white Man, that literacy could be used as a tool to literally escape oppression. To literally gain autonomy and freedom. In 1740, several slave states adopted laws (politics) via The Negro Act, which criminalized the teaching of Blacks to read and write.* The importance of literacy and – in relevance to this particular dialog – the strategy of banning it, has been expressed historically through the institution of slavery. When we ask ourselves of what purpose(s) the applications of anti-literacy served, and we view it through its appropriate lens, we find ample evidence of a racist intent to build and maintain white supremacy and superiority, anti-Blackness and Black inferiority. Or simply put, white male control over Black peoples' bodies. Why is this history relevant to incarceration today?

When the soldiers announced in 1865 that plantation slavery was abolished, they did not announce that all forms of slavery would be abolished in this so-called land of "freedom." Through the politics of legislation (law making), the institution of slavery was allowed to exist in another form. Incarceration. The 13th Amendment of the U.S. constitution–which is the political language that would ultimately bring plantation slavery to its knees–both abolished slavery, and – under the same breath – made an exception clause for it to survive through the times and through all of the civil struggles, so that it would maintain its existence as part of Amerikkka's white supremacist economic culture generations into the future. Since the 13th Amendment made the exception that chattel slavery could exist as punishment for criminal convictions, the institution of slavery was able to symbiotically attach itself to the carceral system, and preserve its existence within this country in spite of all of the civil rights and Black liberation movements. By rerouting slavery's anti-Black ideals through prisons, the "inmate" became the new, or contemporary chattel-property, and all of the dehumanization, abuses, social prejudices, attitudes, and stigmas that were attached to the enslaved, became applicable to the incarcerated party.

Though incarcerated people are not considered to be living "in slavery," prisons have adopted, and insidiously modified many of the practices, attitudes, and strategies of the chattel slave institution. For example, the subject of this specific writing, anti-literacy. Although there may be legal protections against the total prohibition of literacy in Amerikkka, prisons are permitted to severely restrict literary pursuits, including a restriction on how much literary material an incarcerated person can own and possess at one time. In Massachusetts, incarcerated people are only permitted to own and possess ten (10) books, magazines, or newspapers (103 CMR. 403.10(2)(b)), of which each kind of those reading materials counts towards your restricted number of books. For example, if you were to have three newspapers in your possession, you would only be allowed to possess seven books. If we were to include a magazine within these, we would be considered—by the institution — as "over the limit." At that point, our property could be confiscated, and we could be punished for having eleven books. By breaking the rules that prohibit our literary pursuits, the incarcerated person becomes subjected to modified whippings, in the newfangled form of disciplinary sanctions, e.g., loss of privileges such as phone calls to family members, canteen purchases, visits, yard and gym time, loss of tablet, or any other privileges that the institution decides to use as its whip at the moment.

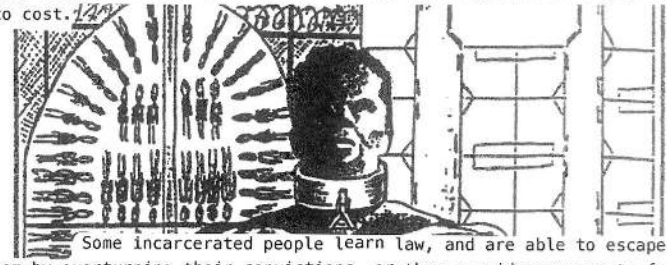
Prison today is a modernized institution for the preservation and perpetuation of white patriarchal ideas of control, supremacy, and profiteering from the oppression of poor, dehumanized human bodies, that are politically targeted to be made inferior to essentially, upper and middle class white settler society.

It is important to recognize that the main purpose of imprisonment today is mass human warehousing. Beyond the profit motive, it is the targeted removal and disappearing of people who are criminalized by the state that remains its primary social function. Yet the economic idea of slavery was also based on making maximum profit by instituting a free-labor workforce. Today, the only law on the books that permits slavery to exist in any form is the 13th Amendment. Because the 13th Amendment failed to abolish slavery in a prison setting, prisons over the years have been able to take on a corporate role, and maximize profits by instituting a free-labor workforce through incarcerated workers. Though, most incarcerated workers earn $1 per day for their servitude, this one dollar payment is simply a slave's wage, and pales in comparison to the minimum wage of $15 dollars per hour in Massachusetts — for example. Contemporary corporations like Keefe Commissary Network, Securus, Corrlinks, Wellpath, etc., have become billionaires off of the modernized oppression of human beings.

Prison and slavery have a symbiotic relationship that have allowed the institution of slavery to survive through decades of civil struggle, and which permits — via insidious political activity and social ignorance — many strategies and activities related to slave breaking and slave making to exist in a contemporary setting. Because the language of slavery still exist on the books today, prisons have been able to benefit from a free-labor workforce, and corporations have been able to exploit billions of dollars from the contemporarily oppressed. The history of anti-literacy has shown us that anti-literacy was a controlling strategy, that was purposed to prevent the gaining of liberties by the oppressed. Anti-literacy is necessary for prisons to function today, because through literacy, the contemporarily oppressed and caged will gain knowledge and education about the ways that we are being manipulated for the benefit of the wealthy and the white, and incarcerated people may learn how to make the connections between slave resistance practices and modern practices as I have done here. If incarcerated people gain a real understanding of how the system works, and of the many ways in which we are bamboozled, people would be encouraged to protest these vile conditions and strategies via intelligent negotiation for equal treatment — as Willie Lynch cautioned against — for things like, perhaps minimum wage.

* I would cite from The Negro Act of 1740, however, when I had it sent to me through the mail, the prison mail staff deemed it contraband. I'm pursuing civil litigation.

Incarcerated laborers - with their literacy - would understand the power of work stoppages, which would be financially detrimental to the functioning of prisons, which could act as a threat for the shutting down of many prisons due to cost.[14]



Some incarcerated people learn law, and are able to escape to freedom by overturning their convictions, or they provide a means to freedom for others by overturning convictions, which - the gaining of freedom - was a fear of white men regarding the education of the oppressed. Anti-literacy is important for the prison industrial complex today because, in order to keep their prison cages open and functioning in a socially affordable way while maximizing profits, free labor is necessary. Therefore, in order to maintain their surplus labor force, the prisons must continue to deprive their contemporary chattel-property from access to information, educational, and legal resources.

Censored

By Panda Insurgente

I was going to start this letter with an old story, a story about the first book that I ever *did not* receive because of Censorship Rules & the banning of books inside. And, I will probably get to a short version of that by the end of this. But as I think about censorship & the banning of books & of words & of thoughts & of ppl, I begin to understand this concept on another level. I start to realize that this is a conspiracy created by THE STATE.

Especially today...

So let me tell you a different story, a more recent one. A couple of days ago, friday the 23rd of september to be Exact, I was woke up @ about 7:45 AM to a banging on my door. Nothing new. However this time, there was ALOT of banging, & yelling, & about 15 pigs outside of my door. More banging & yelling. Snarling & oinking & whatever other noises a gaggle of pigz make together when trying to startle or scare. I guess they did not realize that there was a thousand pound steel door in between us, & a prisoner that gave zero fucks about what they were trying to do or say.

"I have not even brushed my teeth yet... Bastards."

But, I am, a little lost. I may or may not have been a little stoned, maybe an after breakfast friday wake & bake... So for a moment I wondered if I was dreaming?... Almost a lifetime worth of trauma dealt to me by these pigs has caused nightmares of pigs trying to kill me for years. Not to mention, the few times they have actually tried to kill me. But I quickly realized that, "No, this is Not one of those nightmares, that 15 pigs @ my door has actually happened to me over 50 times, & that I will NEVER, EVER get use to it." After a few minutes of shit talking & a short stand-off, I see some "Real" street pigs lurking in the background. With their camos on, & I figure that now was probably the best time to smash any contraband I had. So smash I did. This followed w/ handcuffs much too tight, slamming me into the wall a bit, while being taken to the showers, & stripped. Dehumanized, demoralized. ("Spread em.. again.. again...") But this time instead of taking all of my property & throwing me back into an empty cell, I was chained, shackled, & Black Boxed. Then I was dragged to a white patty wagon style van, with no windows. This van was escorted by another black & white truck, a black undercover SUV & another patty wagon. Now, this was new. I had no clue where I was being taken to—just the snatched & grabbed/disappeared & censored vibe crossed my mind. About 30 minutes later we arrived @ the [redacted] County Jail, I say we because they also had a Mexican homie riding with me that I didn't really know, but he told me almost the same morning scene, happen to him. When they pulled up, they snatched him out first, thru the crack in the door I saw him being charged & booked. Than it was my turn. At this point my mind is lost, because I cannot think of my "crime" that I've committed in the last couple years while being held @ [redacted] Correctional Institution. But when they read my charges: "Conspiracy to Traffick [redacted]" everything started to feel like another nightmare. One that I've never had before. "WTF was going on?" Then one of the scum pigz w/ the ugly shit brown shoes & the shit eating grin, in a low whisper said, "Where are your comrades @ now...?" This of course was followed by silence. Everything was followed by my silence. Every question, every comment, silence or lawyer... Silence or lawyer were my only replyz. "Height?"—lawyer. "Weight?" silence. & so on & so on. They were not even questioning me about any alleged "crime" but I knew from experience silence/lawyer from this moment forward. We were there a few more hours & I was racking my brain. I know the "State" has charged ppl w/ bullshit before. Just to silence them, just to censor them. I just never thought it was going to happen to me. Looking back that was one of my Most Naive Moments. My run-ins w/ the pigz has always been political, & have always been "This". Censoring—silencing... disappearing. After a couple more hours we arrived back @ the prison. I was stripped of all my clothes & property. Everything gone—again. Stolen... Censored... All of my writing & clothes, my jewelry, bookz, & letters.. stolen... No mattress, no sheets. No soap or toiletries.. MY life & thoughts—stolen. My memories & pictures—stolen. Just censored. My life for the 3rd time was censored but this time @ the highest degree.

So as I layed back on this concrete slab, I was deep in my thoughtz. "Conspiracy To Traffick..." .. "Conspiracy" ... my mind was stuck on this word. This "crime" of conspiracy was created by THE STATE to hide ppl without even a crime being committed. When we think about "Conspiracies," most ppl tend to think about things like Bigfoot, Ufo's, Blue Blooded Reptilians of the Empire, & the "What-Ever-Gates" that our world in the Meta tells us about. We don't think about this being a "Crime" that the state has created to vanish ppl. How Do You Prove a Conspiracy? Something that never really happened? a crime of thought? or chance? a truly victimless crime? How do I prove that this is a conspiracy against me? To vanish me? To censor me? To kill me?

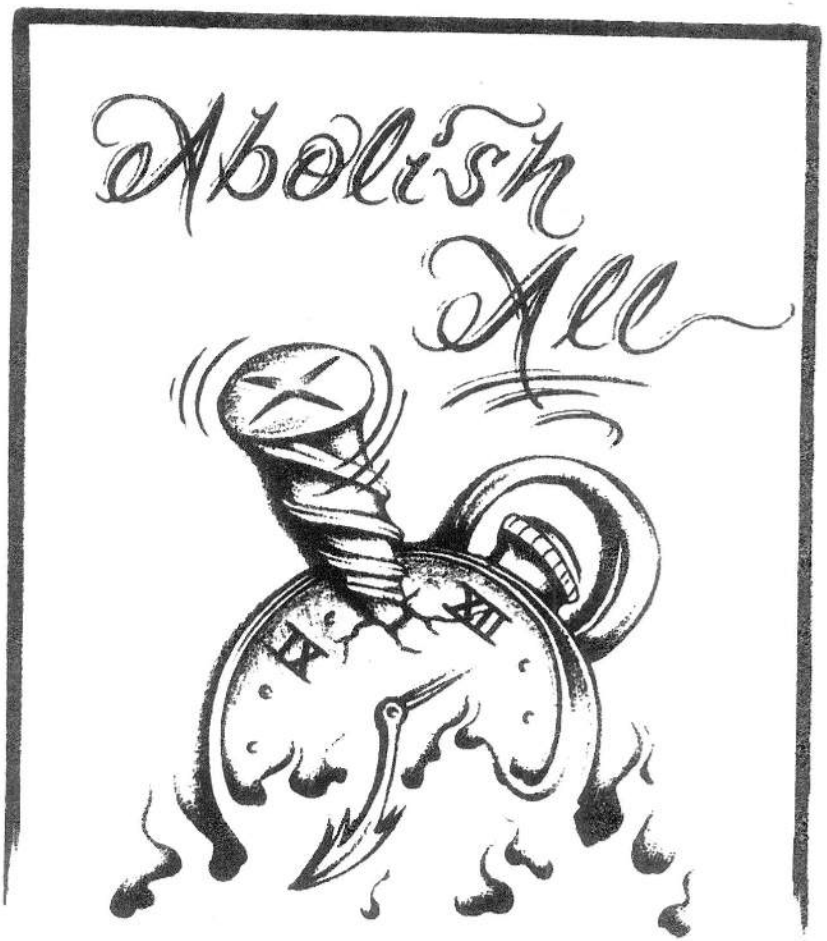
Now, let me go back & tell you a story about the first book that was ever banned for me. It was called "The Book of 5 Rings," an ancient Japanese self-help book written by a samurai. But was censored because the Prison Book "Review Committee" said it taught me how to "be a samurai" (?!) which, of course, was a lie. I remember a lot of things about that moment. I remember I was 18 yr. old. I remember who I was in love with. But I also remember thinking to myself, "How were they allowed to ban bookz? To ban words" It was just knowledge. Instantly, I thought, this was a conspiracy to hide knowledge? I learned that there was a "list" of banned & censored books that was really a HUGE 3-ringed binder. I spent hours then days in it, learning what books were not yet banned, so I could have my family order them. This "list" is an ever growing, almost impossible to challenge, & frustrating to look @ list. Created by the Literary Review Committee, which is actually a White Supremacist/Odinist, that prides himself for "banning *The Militant* newsletter from DOC."

Jumping forward about a year, I received a few zines (that were actually "banned" but slipped thru due to the lazyness of pigz) these zines truly helped radicalize my thinking, & gave me the revolutionary perspective that helped mold me into who I am today. The 3 zines written by a dear Komrade & Hermanito I never had the chance to meet. The Komrade Jose Cruz AKA King Blaze (REST IN POWER). These zines were "The Evolution of Ghetto Style Organization," & "Riders of the Storm, 1 & 2" those zines actually lead to my first "Gang Related Activity & Paraphernalia" D.R. & 30 Dayz in the hole for possessing them.

This was also the first—but far from last—experience of my poetry & writing, being stolen, censored, & banned. My letters leaving the prison started to disappear, never making them home. The letters coming in started to vanish or show up a month late. & this follows w/ many stories of me getting thrown in confinement for my writings & poetry. Now it is just the norm for me. One day I may write all of these stories, really getting into conceptualizing every fuckn event, but RN I just write.

This story of being "Censored or having bookz or zines, or lit or pictures & art banned is not rare inside. Me & all my homies & Komrades have experienced this constantly. This was happening way before I thought to read Che's *Guerilla Warfare* or Komrade George's *Soledad Brother*. Way before I fell in love w/ Assata or found True Kingizm thru King Blaze's zines. I can go on & on to tell you all of the bookz that I read that were banned just because a Komrade or I owned them. But that's not the point. Something that begin to stick out to me, esp. after friday, was that all of these ppl, whether radical or revolutionary or even just too gangsta for AmeriKKKA all experienced one conspiracy or another. Whether charged with one, or killed for one. The censorship of books is more than the banning of words or thoughtz. But a conspiracy from the state to vanish history. It is a way they have disappeared or censored these stories. The stories of the lives of those who have been conspired against. George & Jonathan Jackson, Assata, Che, Conspiracys, Mumia, the Africaz, Safiya Bukhari, Conspiracyz. The disappeared Young Lords & murdered Black Pantherz. Conspiracyz. King Blaze, Lord Gino, K. Blood, Conspiracyz. Jeff Fort, Monster Kody, Larry Hoover, Tookie—Conspiracyz. Kwame 'Beanz' Shakur, King Soloman, Komrade Heru, all 3 being buried on the SHU right now. Conspiracyz. Maroon Shoatz, Karen Smith, Rashid Johnson, Conspiracyz. Leonard Peltier, the guerilla educator Walter Rodney, the Macheterroz, the BLA, & the Real Underground Antifa Movementz. The hacker/hacktivist & Guantamino Bay survivorz, & those who didn't. The Indigenous Water Defendrz & Land Protectorz & so many more that I have no more room on this page to write because I'm still on strip status w/ no property writing on scrapz of paper. All conspiracyz. All have stories we will never hear because of the censorship rules & banning of bookz & writingz on the inside. You will never get to read some of my favorite poetry & essayz, & short stories & letters & communiquez I have written in the last 20 yrz. & I can just imagine from the short list I just named how many of their essayz & art & poetry we will never get to see, read, & experience. How many more ppl will be silenced & books & art stolen? This conspiracy that has been brought against so many inside & out, that lead to this anti-censorship & book banning campaign, the murder & broken spiritz, the forced underground & exiled. The lost communitiez of OUR ppl. This campaign is more than us wanting to fight against bookz being banned, or writingz censored. It's about the conspiracy of storiez lost for ever @ the hands of the state & evil empire, that has vanished us & kills our loved ones.. Before Friday's conspiracy I had 7-10 years left inside.. & now IDK if I'll ever make it up out of here...

Yours in the struggle,
Panda Insurgente



PRISONS

The Censorship of Political Art

By Steven Levy

After 7 years here at Mule Creek State prison, I was denied the right to send out artwork through the mailroom as 1st class mail. Then lo and behold two weeks later my mail requested from my publisher at True Leap Press got banned for the context of the contents. A few random photocopied pages of a book now constitute a "crime," with a harsh CDCR warning attached.

Photocopies from a private party – not allowed Title 15, section 3134.1(a)

This was one of the first times I saw California Dept. of Corrections and Rehabilitation ban photocopies coming into a prison. The mailroom policy bans based on a complete book being copied, not a few random pages sent in, left me no choice but to file a legal grievance to challenge their decision, actions, and blatant disregard to comply with CDCR title 15, taken out of context to ban my mail.

I was singled out because Mailroom staff did not agree with or like the contents of the contents. The incoming Mail from my publisher did not violate the Artist merit clause because it was not a weapon, not a bomb, nor was it nudity. MCSP Staff decided that random images of anonymous face masks, pictures of crime scene tape, Anarchy pictures and various protest images were criminal and not to be issued to me. Knowing I did absolutely nothing wrong yet the mailroom manipulated Title 15 mail policy they left me no choice but to start the legal process that will in time award me monetary damages against the mailroom staff who denied my mail on their moral beliefs. Now I love a good fight and I did win money from R.J. Donovan State Prison in a first level legal 602, since I documented the prison stole money from me for a year.

Now being a published Artist and writer in prison for 23 years—a voiceless faceless man—I would like to talk about a zine called "How COINTELPRO Helped Destroy the Movements of the 1960s," a self-help type book about activism and protest groups. I have been blessed to read it and give it back to my friend as soon as possible. Anyone who possesses a copy of this zine at Mule Creek ends up in solitary confinement, because the prison administration and staff deemed it a threat to the institution. Now being deemed a threat over a book will give you an indeterminate SHU sentence. I have read about people being placed in the SHU due to books on COINTELPRO in many magazines, prison newsletters, and *Prison Legal News* over 23 years.

Knowledge is not power in prison, just another way the stuff can be used against you. The 1st Amendment does not apply to prison prisoners. Read an old *Prison Legal News* and you will find many lawsuits over it by prisoners and lawyers on the streets.

There is a new pattern of censorship sweeping across America under the publics nose. In states like Florida, Texas, and many more the penological penitentiary industry decided with their infinite wisdom to outsource prisoners mail to private contact vendors. In these states mail now is 1) sent to a vendor to scan your mail; 2) post it onto a prisoner's electric tablet; then 3) they off you to print your letters, cards, or photos for a fee then mail them to you. 4) they destroy all mail once it has been scanned. No more 1st amendment.

I think this systematic striping of prisoners of their 1st amendment rights is wrong because:

1) poor prison prisoners cannot afford to buy the mail scanned into their tablets;
2) many tablet computers in prisoners possession have been hacked/could get hacked. Note: CDCR Global tel California prisoners tablets were all hacked in 2022 (I have a copy of the letter!)
3) Prison tablets have been stolen and shared with other prisoners and their personal information, photos, card are exposed to any or all prisoners in the housing unit or on the yard.
4) Why should a family member pay for the mail to be sent and the prisoners incur a second loss to get it? 5) tablets can loose their memory and any tablet can be corrupted by a virus or worm.

I am only touching the tip of a very big iceberg, since there are millions of 1st amendment stories (read *Prison Legal News* and other prisoner solidarity newsletters).

Will I soon be in a SHU on solitary confinement? It's sad to say "I might!" because I challenged the ever and all powerful mailroom staff.

New 1st amendment issue, nobody talks about: Freedom of speech and information does not exist in prison. Case in point, countless books and magazines are sent to countless prisoners every day of the year. Now if a cop deems the book or magazine a threat a banned publication notice is issued and you are given the options 1) sent it back, 2) destroy it, in rare instances 3) donate it.

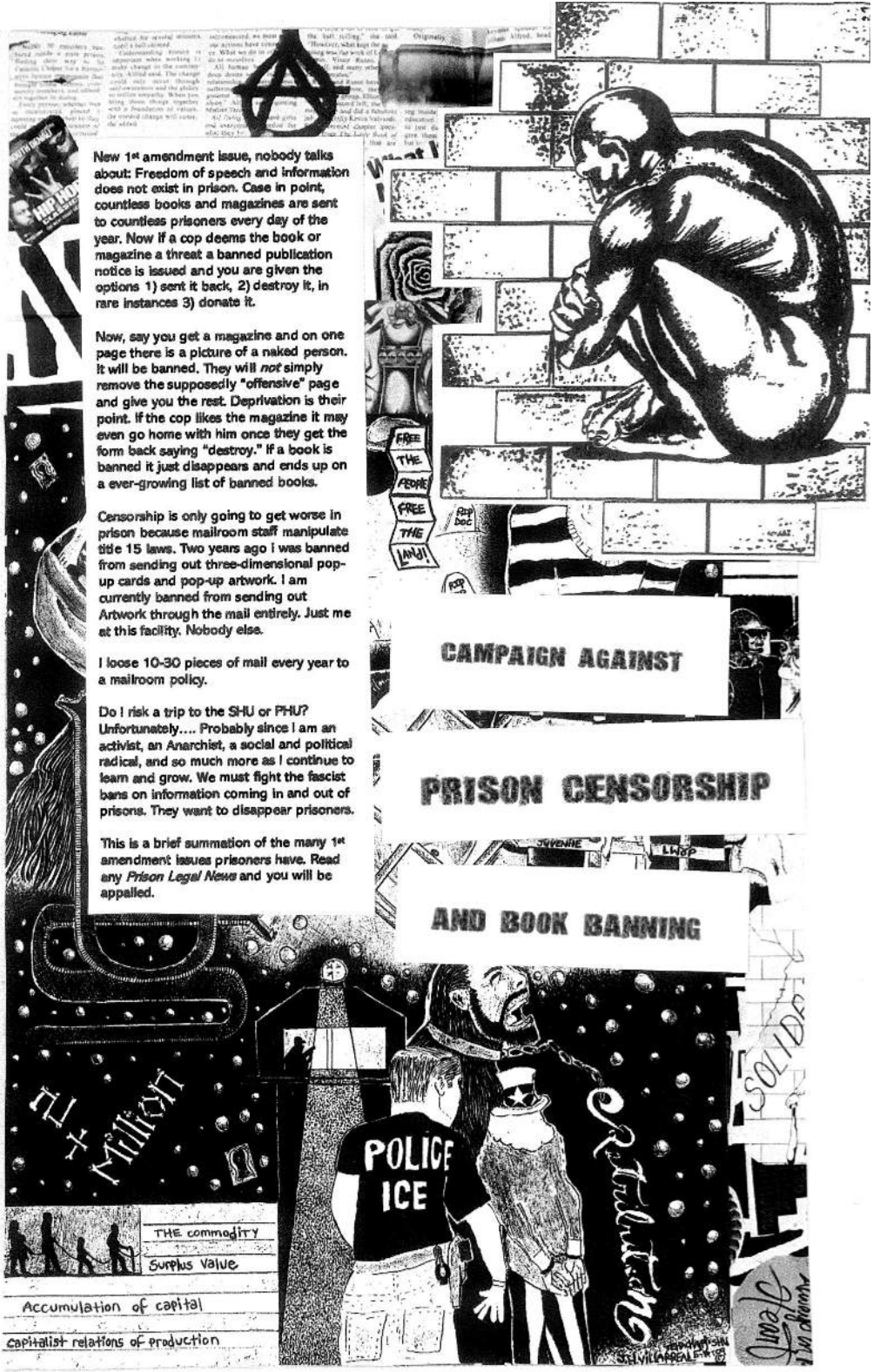
Now, say you get a magazine and on one page there is a picture of a naked person. It will be banned. They will *not* simply remove the supposedly "offensive" page and give you the rest. Deprivation is their point. If the cop likes the magazine it may even go home with him once they get the form back saying "destroy." If a book is banned it just disappears and ends up on a ever-growing list of banned books.

Censorship is only going to get worse in prison because mailroom staff manipulate title 15 laws. Two years ago I was banned from sending out three-dimensional pop-up cards and pop-up artwork. I am currently banned from sending out Artwork through the mail entirely. Just me at this facility. Nobody else.

I loose 10-30 pieces of mail every year to a mailroom policy.

Do I risk a trip to the SHU or PHU? Unfortunately.... Probably since I am an activist, an Anarchist, a social and political radical, and so much more as I continue to learn and grow. We must fight the fascist bans on information coming in and out of prisons. They want to disappear prisoners.

This is a brief summation of the many 1st amendment issues prisoners have. Read any *Prison Legal News* and you will be appalled.



Martin Sostre and the Destruction of Censorship Regulations in the 1960's and 1970's.

By Lorenzo Komboa Ervin

This article is continued political education for the building of a new movement against prison and political censorship in this period. Although the prison regulations and outside social conditions are not the same as they were in the 1960's, when the Prisoner's Rights Movement was founded, alongside the civil rights and radical protest movements of that time, we are still forced to fight what is now political censorship used in the streets, schools and prisons by the same authorities and institutions.

An important activist prisoner, in what became the Prisoners' Rights Movement back in the day, was Martin Sostre, an Afro-Latinx political prisoner, who had been framed for the Black rebellion in Buffalo, New York, after opening and operating the Afro-Asian bookstore in the Black community in 1967. Many Black youth, college students, and white radical activists met frequently at the bookstore before and during the rebellion. In truth, the rebellion was an anti-cop protest brought on by years of racial persecution and police terror. Sostre and a fellow worker at the bookstore, Geraldine Robinson, were publicly vilified as "provokers" of the riot, racial agitators, and communists, then framed in the racist court system. He was given 41 years in prison, whilehis alleged co-defendant was given two yearsin prison. This was all covered up with a false charge that they were using the bookstore for narcotics and other alleged criminal acts. There is no question that they were being persecuted by the state for their political views and organization.

I met Martin Sostre in 1969, when he and I were both confined at the Federal House of Detention in New York City. I had just been brought back to the country from East Germany, my last place of asylum, after I had hijacked a plane to Cuba earlier that year.

I had hijacked a commercial airline at gunpoint in Atlanta, Georgia, running from racist "Southern justice" and the FBI. I was on the run for most of that year. In hijacking a plane and forcing it to land in Cuba, I faced grave legal dangers. This was a time when hijacking a plane meant that you faced the death penalty or life in prison without possibility of parole. When arrested by U.S. authorities, they knew I was a "Black militant" and communist, so there would be no leniency, especially from an all-white jury in the South, in a racist klan hovel called Newnan, Georgia.

Martin always told me the truth about what could happen to me, that it would be deadly and that he did not know how I would come out. Yet, he always told me to have no fear and to never give up, no matter what I faced down South. He knew a "legal lynching" in Georgia could end my life; he just didn't want me to to surrender and beg those racists for mercy. He knew I wouldn't get any mercy from those racists anyway.

He also knew first-hand what the racist legal and prison systems in America were all about. In New York state prisons, Sostre had suffered immeasurably. He had faced many long years of physical and mental torture; both in his first prison sentence, as well as the " riot" and drugs frame-up case at his Black radical bookstore in Buffalo, N.Y. Yet years of racism, solitary confinement, and an environment of fear, degradation, and intimidation did not break him, It made him stronger and more determined in his resistance.

So, his advice to a 20-year-old "kid", who had never even been to prison before, was to "keep your head up and keep fighting." Which from him was not just optimistic, but focused on resistance. He had always followed his own advice. Earlier in his prison term in the 1960's at Attica, Martin had filed a number of lawsuits against New York state prison officials: against discrimination towards adherents of the Nation of Islam; to require a fair administrative hearing before disciplinary punishment could be imposed; lawsuits against the NYS Board of Parole, and many claims that conditions of solitaryconfinement were unconstitutional, and a number of other issues, But it was his lawsuit against prison censorship which ultimately overturned prison censorship, and changed overall conditions for hundreds of thousands of prisoners nationwide, and created a mass prisoners' fightback movement. It showed that self-help legal rights for prisoners was the central issue laying the foundation for prisoners' rights by challenging conditions of confinement and inhuman treatment

Truthfully, I was just one of those prisoners who followed his instructions to bring lawsuits against prison officials in the areas of the country where their prisons were located, in order to give the New York federal anti-censorship case and its order in Sostre v. Oris, a national application to all prison systems. This would give teeth to all prison censorship struggles and a model for judges everywhere to issue similar rulings.

Shortly before I was transferred to Georgia, he told me in minute detail how to fight my criminal case in court in Georgia, but even also wrote out the blank lawsuit and other documents so that I could repeat his prisoners' civil rights lawsuit in the federal prison court system, and other states. I did exactly as instructed, and then used the prisoner underground to get these legal anti-censorship materials into other prisons.

When I first went to federal prison in 1970, the Christian bible was the only book that prisoners were allowed to own. Everything else was confiscated by prison officials as "contraband." Thus, all the literature I had received in the Fulton County Jail in Atlanta was immediately confiscated.

Then, I worked with other federal and state prisoners to file lawsuits all over the country. The simultaneous pressure of these lawsuits literally "burst open the doors" of both state and federal prisons everywhere. In no time, it seemed, prisons that previously had prison censorship rules so stringent as to only allow the King James bible, now were forced to allow Anarchist, Marxist, Black Nationalist, and all manner of controversial or "radical" materials.

This allowed prisoners to receive "Muhammad Speaks, the Black Panther Party Intercommunal Newspaper, the Guardian, and so many others never seen in prisons. Out of this came political discussions or organizing that never happened before, and it quickly led to prisoner lending libraries, Black and ethnic cultural studies programs, and many other basic rights for prisoners, even in my traditionally racist and conservative prison at Terre Haute, Indiana, federal prison.

Seeing this, many old school repressive prison guards and wardens began to quit their jobs and complained about the alleged "coddling" of prisoners. This happened through the 1970's, but especially after the Attica New York state prison rebellion in September 1971. Although the Attica rebellion cost the lives of over 40 prisoners and guards, and the torture of hundreds more, while it lasted it educated millions of people on their televisions, when they listened to the prisoner leaders describe their grievances and other mistreatment: These civilians were further jolted "into reality" when they saw the state of New York's murderous armed counterattack caused by the governor's hard line stance against further negotiations. Prisoners at Attica were literally slaughtered live on television.

Because of their revulsion, overnight, it seemed, millions of people would now understand the degree of racism, degradation, and repression that the prisoners were forced to live with. Unlike the usually vacuous and escapist TV shows that the American public watched, now they were forced to see the prisoners tortured to death while all looked on.

At the end there was a bloodbath, which was supposed to silence a nation of prisoners, the Black poor, political radicals, anti-war activists, civil right protesters, students, and many others. But we did not give up in fear or resignation. Protests broke out all over the nation, urban ghettos, college campuses, churches, barrios, and so many other places to express outrage at this fascist assault. The cry of "Attica, Attica, Attica" was everywhere. Everyone knew what it meant. Tens of thousands of prisoners created a strike wave in prisons all over the USA and the world. Further, ordinary people on the outside volunteered to help prisoners, and began to speak out against racism and prison guard brutality. Law students and their professors filed lawsuits over prison conditions; pastors and divinity leaders talked about prison abolition and the "sin of racism" from the pulpit; Black community and civil rights activists began to denounce racism and the oppression of Black people in prisons by white racist society and government. It seemed everyone was expressing their outrage over the bloody repression of Attica.

More important is that a new prison abolitionist movement was created. This included Anarchists with a traditional abolitionist stance, related to anti-statism, the New Left radical tendencies, traditional civil rights groups, radical feminist tendencies and Queer liberation, and the Black Panther Party on the Black Left. This new prisoner support movement was an active civil rights movement, which supported the actual rise of a Prisoners' Rights movement, affiliated with or inspired by radical and Black student movements like Black Power, other groups like the New Left, Vietnam anti-war movement, and many others in that period.

In his successful fight against censorship and the banning of Black and radical literature, Sostre opened the door for all this to happen. The idea that one man in solitary confinement had the nerve to fight back caused many of us to speak up as well. We realized that together as prisoners, we could do a great many things to resist prison abuse. Books and the free thinking brought by them opened our eyes and cleared our minds to the possibilities of liberation. None of this would have happened without the courageous example of Martin Sostre. He is an example of resistance and radical belief.

In the 1960s and 1970's, the heyday of the American Prisoners' Rights Movement, a movement not unlike the major civil rights and radical protest movements of the period, surfaced and fought for and won human rights for the hundreds of thousands of prisoners in the American prison system. Of course, Ronald Reagan and Right-wing conservatives took over the government, and they reversed most of the gains and muted the voices of prisoner-organizers which had arisen in that earlier period. They virtually have now destroyed almost any ability of prisoners alone to contest their oppressive living conditions from the inside. This is why prisoners and abolitionists must start anew. We must build a movement between prisoners and prison abolitionists on the outside.

This is why I believe today that we can win against the reimposed censorship regulations. Simply stated, we have done it before and can do it again.

MIDWEST BOOKS TO PRISONERS

Legal Materials

will send you legal materials upon **REQUEST BY CHAPTER and/or TOPIC.** (We are not able to provide legal advice or representation)

Columbia Jailhouse Lawyers Manual.

Ch 1: How to Use the JLM
Ch 2: Introduction to Legal Research
Ch 3: Your Right to Learn the Law & Go to Court
Ch 4: How to Find a Lawyer
Ch 5: Choosing a Court and a Lawsuit
Ch 6: An Introduction to Legal Documents
Ch 7: Freedom of Information
Ch 8: Obtaining Information to Prepare Your Case: The Process of Discovery
Ch 9: Appealing Your Conviction or Sentence
Ch 10: Applying for Re-Sentencing for Drug Offenses
Ch 11: Using Post-Conviction DNA testing to Attack Your Conviction or Sentence
Ch 12: Appealing Your Conviction Based on Ineffective Assistance of Counsel
Ch 13: Federal Habeas Corpus
Ch 14: The Prison Litigation Reform Act
Ch 15: Inmate Grievance Procedures
Ch 16: Using 42 U.S.C. § 1983 to Obtain Relief from Violations of Federal
Ch 17: The State's Duty to Protect You and Your Property: Tort Actions
Ch 18: Your Rights At Prison Disciplinary Proceedings
Ch 19: Your Right to Communicate with the Outside World
Ch 20: Using Article 440 if the New York Criminal Procedure Law to Attack Your Unfair Conviction or Illegal Sentence
Ch 21: State Habeas Corpus: Florida, New York, and Michigan
Ch 22: How to Challenge Administrative Decisions Using Article 78 of the New York Civil Practice Law and Rules
Ch 23: Your Right to Adequate Medical Care
Ch 24: Your Right to be Free from Assault by Prison Guards and Other Incarcerated People
Ch 25: Your Right to be Free from Illegal Body Searches
Ch 26: Infectious Diseases: AIDS, Hepatitis, Tuberculosis, and MRSA in Prison
Ch 27: Religious Freedom in Prison
Ch 28: Rights of Incarcerated People with Disabilities
Ch 29: Special Issues for Incarcerated People with Mental Illness
Ch 30: Special Information for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and/or Queer Incarcerated People
Ch 31: Security Classification and Gang Validation
Ch 32: Parole
Ch 33: Rights of Incarcerated Parents
Ch 34: The Rights of Pretrial Detainees
Ch 35: Getting Out Early: Conditional and Early Release
Ch 36: Special Considerations for Sex Offenders
Ch 37: Rights Upon Release
Ch 38: Rights of Youth in Prison
Ch 39: Temporary Release Programs
Ch 40: Plea Bargaining
Ch 41: Special Issues of Incarcerated Women

Section IX: Appendices

Appendix I: Addresses of Federal Courts & New York State Prisons and Their Respective Federal Judicial Districts
Appendix II: New York State: Filing Instructions & Addresses of New York State Courts
Appendix III: Addresses of New York District Attorneys
Appendix IV: Directory of Legal and Social Services for Incarcerated People

WRITE THEM FOR LEGAL PAMPHLETS! (3-5 SELECTIONS PER REQUEST)

Midwest Books to Prisoners
1321 N. Milwaukee Ave PMB #460
Chicago, IL 60622

NOT ONLY DO WE DESIRE TO CHANGE OUR LIVES IMMEDIATELY, IT IS THE CRITERION BY WHICH WE ARE SEEKING OUR ACCOMPLICES.

CENSORSHIP

Oakland Abolition & Solidarity
P.O. Box 12594, Oakland, CA 94604

True Leap Press: Zine Distro
P.O. Box 6045
Concord, CA 94524

South Chicago ABC
Zine Distro
P.O. Box 721
Homewood, IL 60430

Free for prisoners

Anti-copyright